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## Small Arms, Romance, and Crime and Violence in Post WW II Thai Society\*

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### Abstract

During World War II and the immediate postwar years, essentially because of the proliferation of modern small arms, law and order in Thai society were increasingly and seriously threatened. The spread of crime and violence in both urban and rural Thai society during the postwar years was phenomenal. This failure of law and order was well evidenced, among others, in the parliamentary debates towards the end of the War and during the postwar years. Such challenge to the state authority, and to the principles of law and order, was also strongly presence in the new, more or less unique, and highly popular postwar Thai literary genre—the “crime and violence” romance. The surge of crime and violence in both urban and rural Thailand during the 1950s became a pretext of the military coup led by Sarit in 1958 which eventually ushered in the infamous “Sarit Regime.”

**Keywords:** small arms, romance, crime and violence, post World War II Thai society, Thailand

. . . [A] weapon in itself does not kill. It is always a human being who pulls the trigger. . . . It is, however, the use of small arms in uncontrolled violence, atrocities and criminal activities that constitutes the problem. . . .

. . . much political attention and diplomatic effort has been focused on preventing the spread and use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the so-called “weapons of mass destruction.” . . . The real responsibility for mass destruction, however, lies with other, less exotic weapons which have been spread far and wide. And they have been used frequently. . . .

Small arms are also the most commonly used tools in political repression, crime and terrorist attacks around the world. . . .

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Daily, many people are threatened by the widespread availability and misuse of small arms. . . .

From "Small Arms-Great Challenges"  
The Fridtjof Nansen Memorial Lecture  
by Knut Vollebaek  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway  
12 October 1998, Peace Palace, The Hague

## **Introduction**

One aspect of modern Thai history that deserves more serious attention is the impact of World War II on urban and rural Thai society, in particular the consequent spread of crime and violence. During the prewar period, modern war technology, namely strategy, tactics, organization as well as modern arms, was more or less a state monopoly, and it was partly through this control of military technology that law and order in Thai society were to an extent maintained. This monopoly was, however, increasingly challenged during the last phase of the War and the immediate postwar years by the process of "the democratization of small arms," when for the first time in its modern history the "non-state sectors" of Thai society could gain access to a sizable amount of modern small arms and to modern military technology.

This paper attempts an analysis of the process, and social and political impact, of the "democratization" of modern small arms in urban and rural Thai society during World War II and the postwar years. It also discusses how the "democratization" of small arms, together with the increasing public familiarization with modern war technology, related to the emergence and popularity of "the crime and violence romance" during the postwar years; and, finally, how such "democratization" helped transform crime and violence in one particular rural area in Central Thailand during the 1950s so much so that the restoration of law and order called for a full military operation.

## **WW II and the Proliferation of Small Arms in Thai Society**

For obvious reasons, modern arms and western military technology—strategy, tactics and organization—have been introduced into Thai society since the very beginning of its modernization process in the mid nineteenth century. Western military officers were hired to set up the organization and the training of troops, and modern arms, heavy and small, were imported to equip the new military units and installations. The modernization of the military and other so-called peacekeeping forces, such as the police, gained momentum during the reign of Rama V when both the army and the navy were transformed into new, modern military forces. Cadet schools were established during the reign and many of the king's favorite sons as well as other successful candidates from more humble backgrounds were sent for further military education and advanced training in Europe. The old *corvée* system was also abolished and young men at the prescribed age of 21 were conscripted into military service for two years.

However, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern arms and military technology remained largely the monopolies of the state. It is true that the new military services through their basic training programs for conscripts and military drills and exercises must have provided a few Thai from both urban and rural backgrounds who had spent time as conscripts with some knowledge of military formation and organization, tactics as well as small arms firing. But the kind of military knowledge and skills acquired during this early period of military reform must have been rather limited and rudimentary in nature. For one thing, modern, compulsory public education was still in its infancy and most of the conscripts were illiterate, or at best only had a few years of monastic education. Military technology, therefore, was more or less by default reserved only for those professionals in the regular military services.

In addition, without an access to modern small arms, such basic military technology in the hands of village and urban folks proved useless in transforming the nature of the social relationship with their fellow countrymen. Neither did it change their relationship with the state. In other words, without access to modern small arms, any challenge to state authorities, law and order, with or without political cause, remained largely in the traditional mode of violent culture.

Indeed, prior to the 1940s, most of the modern small arms in Thailand were in the possession of the state for public peacekeeping and military defense purposes. Tips, in his recent study of crime in Thai society during the late nineteenth century, might have made an error in his conclusion when he over-states that, "There were a great number of handguns in the community [Ayutthaya/the Central Plain] and they seem to have been frequently used to stage house plundering and robberies in and outside homes" [Tips 1998: 276]. His study is based entirely on the information provided in the "roll call of court cases" which was personally kept by Robert J. Kirkpatrick, Siam's first legal advisor. During September 1896–February 1897, Kirkpatrick chaired "the Ayuthia Special Commission for the Reorganisation of the Provincial Courts." "The roll call" was the record in brief of all the court cases that were brought for trial before the Commission. Altogether, about 230 cases were called for trial or re-trial during those six months. Out of these 230 cases, no less than 76 cases described either by the original author of the "roll call" or by Tips himself as "plunder," "assault," "manslaughter," "violent robbery," "armed robbery," or "murder," which suggest the use of some kind of lethal weapon was involved and deadly injury was inflicted upon one or both parties. The rest were cases of rape, abduction, tax evasion, illegal sale of spirits, theft of cattle, theft of boat, bribery, etc.

However, on closer scrutiny, of the 76 cases involving weapons tried by the "Ayuthia Commission" in 1896–97, only 18 cases, mostly under the classification of "plunder," involved the use of guns. Although a few revolvers and at least a shotgun were actually identified in the "roll call," no rifle was reported as part of the crimes and judging from the brief information given in other cases in the "roll call," such as the mention of gun powder, most of the guns

involved in these criminal acts must have been the old, outdated muzzle-loading muskets and home-made handguns known locally either as “*colt tra khwai*” (buffalo brand colts) or “*Thai pradit*” (made by Thai).<sup>1)</sup> Most noticeably in the other 60 or so “deadly injury inflicted” cases are the weapons used which were invariably described in the “roll call” as sword, long knife, stick, spear and club.

Peasant uprisings in the North and the Northeast during the very first years of the twentieth century, namely the “Shan Rebellion” and the “Holy Man’s Rebellion” of 1901–02, were in no better situation in terms of modern small arms. In both incidents, most rebels carried with them as their personal arms spears, swords and flintlocks, and, in the case of the “Holy Man’s Rebellion,” relied entirely on the supernatural power of their leaders and all the amulets and magic charms as their protective shields against the more powerful modern firearms of the Thai government expeditionary forces [Tej 1981: 28; Murdoch 1974: 59; Toem 1999: 437–442]. The only modern small arms in the possession of the rebels were those few handguns and rifles confiscated from the provincial authorities during surprise attacks at the very beginning of the uprisings. It was no surprise, therefore, that both “rebellions” were suppressed, and peace, law and order, restored after the government expeditionary forces had settled in.

The limited availability of modern small arms among the general public during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was attributable more to the limited supply and, hence, the high price of imported firearms, than to the restrictive or prohibitive measure of the authorities. As observed by Tips in his study of crime already mentioned, “Siam had no gun control laws whatsoever during the period under consideration . . .” [Tips 1998: 276]. But those imported modern small arms such as revolvers, semi automatic pistols, shotguns, and rifles were obviously too expensive for, and beyond the reach of, common folks, and only the rich, foreign diplomats and residents, and the aristocrats could afford one. By the early twentieth century, an imported revolver or bolt action rifle cost at least 120 baht [NA 1909: R5 FA/33, German Minister to Prince Devawongse, May 26], while a first grade government clerk received a salary of only 20 baht per month [Sathiankoses 1967: 95].

The 1920s saw an increase in the availability of small arms in Thai society, especially in the provinces, which must have caused quite an alarm among concerned authorities, such as the Ministry of Interior, the Police Department, local provincial governors and district officers. A daily newspaper in Bangkok in 1926 reported that the local authority of Trat, the easternmost province on the Gulf of Thailand bordering on Cambodia, confiscated hundreds of illegal firearms each year. Firearms confiscated included, among others, revolvers and Mauser pistols. Rifles must have also been present. The accumulated amount of confiscated firearms

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1) As late as 1950, legally authorized muzzle-loading muskets in private possession, most of which were presumably made locally, amounted to 294,848 pieces, which made up almost half of all registered firearms in Thailand [NA 1952: M 0201.7, Statistics of Registered Firearms in 1950]. The keyword here is, however, “registered.”

and ammunition during those years was so large that soon the responsible authority did not care to keep an updated, proper inventory of these firearms and was careless enough to let someone walk in and take away some 60–70 guns from the arsenal under his charge [NA 1926: R7 M 26.2/1, News clipping: *Bangkok Kan Muang*, December 25].

This sudden increase of small arms in Thai society must have been consequent upon the worldwide surplus of war supply after the end of WW I, part of which was smuggled into Thailand via French Indochina; hence Trat was one of the prime spots for contraband firearms. The looming political conflicts and tensions in Europe during the late 1920s and early 1930s must have also increased the supply of war materials in the world market. It was probably partly for this reason, as well as presumably for its membership in the League of Nations, that the Thai parliament in 1933 enacted a bill to control the import and possession of arms, war materials and supply, including all the lethal chemicals used in the internationally unacceptable conduct of modern warfare [NA 1933: (3) SR 0201.58/6, 1933 War Materials Control Act]. Another bill was enacted in 1934 for the control of guns, ammunition, explosives and fireworks [PPS 1940: 7/2483, 348–366].

During the following years, small arms, especially handguns, apparently became more and more popular and even became part of many private individuals' daily tools in the rural areas for the protection of their lives and property. Several motions from provincial members of parliament were registered in the parliamentary records during 1938–40 concerning the over complicated process, as provided in the Criminal Code and in the 1934 Gun Control Law, by which an individual in the rural area could apply for a handgun carrying permit. Revisions of related laws were thus proposed, one in 1938 by an MP of Chumporn (in the upper South), the other in 1940 by an MP of Kanchanaburi (in the Central Plain) [PPS 1938: 16/2481, 899–916; PPS 1940: 7/2483, 348–366]. A motion was also put before the parliament in 1939 by an MP of Pathumthani, near Bangkok, concerning the alleged widely spread possession of illegal firearms throughout the country [PPS 1939: 6/2482, I, 64–65]. Expressed concern on the spread of illegal firearms was repeated with some urgency in the following year by an MP of Khonkaen (in the Northeast) who claimed that during and after the Franco-Siamese Conflict of 1940–41 over French Indochina, a huge amount of guns and ammunition was smuggled into the country, most of which were believed to have fallen into private hands. A proposal was put forward for an amnesty and for their registration as legally authorized firearms [PPS 1941: 9/2484, 442]. It seems from this particular motion and others that it was generally believed that illegal, unauthorized firearms in private hands tended to be used to commit crime, and that the spread of illegal, unauthorized firearms in the community was, therefore, held responsible for the sharp increase in crimes. On the other hand, most honest people for their bona fide cause of life and property protection preferred to have legally authorized firearms.

However, it was during WW II that the spread of small arms in Thai society truly reached its critical stage for the first time. Thailand during the last year of the war and the immediate postwar years is aptly dubbed by Goscha, in his excellent study of the Vietnamese Revolution

networks, as “A Land Awash In Arms” [Goscha 1999: 184]. In addition to other less lethal small arms, thousands of automatic pistols, submachine guns, hand grenades, grenade launchers, and all kinds of explosives, were almost freely circulating around the country during those years. A few years after the war was over, the Thai government found it necessary for various reasons to move in to restore law and order and to put a tight control over the private possession of small arms. The possession of all those submachine guns and more lethal weapons were outlawed, and an amnesty was declared for home made muskets, handguns, shotguns and small caliber rifles. Consequently, a grand total of 578,739 pieces of firearms were legally registered. As previously noted, muzzle-loading muskets, a total of 294,848 pieces, made up about half of those registered. This was followed by 158,726 shotguns, 118,936 revolvers and automatic pistols, 3,314 small caliber rifles and 2,915 air pressure guns [NA 1952: M 0201.7, Statistics of Registered Firearms in 1950]. Unfortunately but quite understandably, no statistics of those more lethal, illegal weapons and small arms is available.

As identified in Goscha’s study, there were three major sources of the proliferation of small arms in Thailand during and immediately after WW II.

First, the arms, ammunition and war supply of the Allied forces, namely the British SOE Force 136 and the American OSS, destined for the use of the Seri Thai, the local resistance movement, especially during the last year of the War.

Second, arms, ammunition and war supply of the Japanese troops in Thailand surrendered to the Allied forces after the war was over.

Third, the postwar worldwide war supply surplus [Goscha 1999: 184].

Through their secret collaboration with the Allied powers, by the second half of 1944, the domestic branch of the Seri Thai began to receive, first, agents and communications equipment that were airdropped to sites to the south of Bangkok and in the mountain regions of the Central Plain. First shipment of an expanded load of arms and equipment from the Allied forces was executed at Hua Hin through airdrops in November of the same year. In addition to other equipment and supply were “a large number of Sten and Bren guns.” This was followed by “dozens of similar drops” in the following months [Haseman 1978: 112–113]. Submarines were also used to ship arms and supply to the Seri Thai based in Southern Thailand [Goscha 1999: 185].

As the Japanese force was on retreat in all fronts throughout Southeast Asia, the activities and recruitment for new members of the Thai resistance movement rapidly expanded. By the first half of 1945, the Seri Thai successfully established its major stronghold in the Northeast. Several operation bases and recruits training camps were set up. Airfields were constructed in the remote mountainous areas where Allied cargo planes landed and delivered even larger loads of arms and equipment to the Seri Thai [Haseman 1978: 114–115; Sawat 2000: 74].

No exact, reliable and broken-down figures of arms supplied by the Allies to the Thai resistance movement during the last years of the war are available. One contemporary source,

however, estimated that by the end of the war, about 200 tons of arms and war materials had been delivered by air into Thailand [Haseman 1978: 137]. Another contemporary US military report gave a figure of 72 tons of Allied arms delivered in June 1945, more than 100 tons on 31 July and about 13,368 pounds as the war came to an end [Goscha 1999: 185]. A postwar British study commented that “enough arms were channeled into Siam by submarine or airdrops to arm ‘100,000 men’” [*loc. cit.*].

It is to be noted that not all Allied arms and supply destined for the Seri Thai got through to them. Some airdrops missed the target sites and the arms fell into the hands of nearby village folks. The postwar British study further commented that “barely half of these arms reached their veritable destinations” [*loc. cit.*]. Although after the war it was supposed that all of the Thai resistance movement Allied weapons were to be surrendered to the appropriate government authority [PPS 1947: 21/2490, 1944–1945], it was not so. A memo from one Army department to the Office of the Prime Minister Secretariat in September 1947 denied ever having received arms from the Seri Thai when it was officially disbanded after the war [NA 1947: (2) SR 0201.99/32, Memo from the Prime Minister Secretariat to the Minister of Interior, September 6]. Presumably, only a small number were turned in, while the rest remained either in the hands of former Seri Thai cadre or stockpiled in secret depots under charge of certain Seri Thai leaders in the Northeast [Goscha 1999: 185].

In the case of the Japanese surrendered arms, it was estimated that at the end of the war there were over 100,000 well armed Japanese soldiers deployed throughout Thailand. In addition to the ordinary garrison troops, there were also some front line battle hardened combat forces. Again, there is no exact figure of Japanese arms surrendered to the Allied force, but according to Goscha's study, the British who were charged with disarming the Japanese force, arranged 7 permanent dumps and about 83 temporary ones throughout the country in order to stockpile Japanese arms. Three Thai battalions were engaged by the British to guard the 7 large, permanent dumps [*ibid.*: 184]. When the disarmament was over and the British disarming force eventually pulled out in early 1946, none of these Japanese arms were taken away with them. Some of the Japanese arms were simply destroyed by throwing into the port of Bangkok, but most others remained in the Thai army arsenals. Those thrown into the water were later retrieved by local arms traders and many in the arsenals found their way into the hands of private individuals as well as arms traders [*ibid.*: 184–185].

In addition to the undoubtedly large amount of Japanese surrendered arms circulating in Thailand after the war, there were also reports of attacks on small and isolated Japanese patrols by local Thai resistance members during the war. In one particular incident, a Japanese river convoy in northern Thailand was ambushed by a force of over 100 guerrillas in March 1945. Fourteen Japanese soldiers were killed and small arms and ammunition were seized. In another OSS intelligence in July 1945, 14 similar ambushes were reported [Haseman 1978: 137].

The last major source of small arms was the war supply surplus which, literally speaking,



flooded over Thailand during the postwar years. Situated amidst countries where anti imperialist independence movements were operating in full force, Thailand was, in the words of Goscha, right “at the crossroads of regional and international arms flows” [Goscha 1999: 189]. Local and international arms traders in Bangkok dealt with agents of Lao, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Indonesian nationalist movements for the supply of arms, some of which were those Allied arms and captured Japanese arms from within Thailand and the Philippines, while others were unused WW II surplus arms recently shipped from their American and European manufacturers for the growing arms market in Southeast Asia [*ibid.*: 189–196]. It is reasonable to presume that initially most of these imported war surplus arms were transshipped via Bangkok to those neighboring nationalist movements and only a small fraction of them found their way into the possession of private Thai individuals. This is to a certain extent confirmed by a report of the then Thai Minister of Interior to the parliament in May 1947 which pointed only to the Seri Thai Allied arms and the Japanese surrendered arms as the two major sources of small arms circulating in Thailand [PPS 1947: 3/2490, 19–20]. However, a year later, in 1948, there seemed to be some new developments regarding the surplus war supply. There was increasingly serious concern among senior Thai military authorities that more and more lethal small arms, especially “Sten, Carbine and Thompson submachine guns,” were being smuggled into Thailand and many of these might have fallen into the hands of private individuals, hence a threat to peace, law and order. Discussions were held between responsible authorities, and steps to curb the spread of these arms, and death sentence to offenders, were proposed [NA 1948: (2) SR 0201.99/31, Memo from Defense Minister to the Prime Minister, Secret, September 24].

Indeed, the proliferation of small arms in Thailand during and after the war provided an access, never before existed, to modern lethal arms to many private individuals, especially those in the rural areas where the Seri Thai had its operation bases and training camps, and in the towns where the depots of Japanese surrendered arms were kept. In one instance, it was claimed that some private individuals had in their possession more than 15 submachine guns, plus a number of hand grenades and automatic pistols! [PRD 1947: Agenda for ministerial under secretaries conference, 1062–1063]. Some of these might have come into their hands free of charge as part of their membership in the resistance movement. Others were acquired in the black market, and since the supply was large, the price was understandably relatively low and affordable.

Such a sudden surge of small arms yet again created a grave concern among lawmakers and law enforcers. During parliamentary debates, the spread of small arms, particularly those former Seri Thai arms, was linked to the sharp increase of crimes throughout the country [PPS 1947: 21/2490, 1946]. A revised arms bill was drafted in 1946 and eventually tabled in the parliament for debate in 1947. During its session, most MPs agreed that there was a general failure of law and order, and that a tight control of the possession and use of small arms be imposed and strictly enforced in order to prevent more crimes. Some, however, put forward an

argument that since all those bandits had access to advanced, more powerful Seri Thai small arms, such as Stens, Carbines and Thompson submachine guns, as well as hand grenades, it was only right that the proposed revised arms bill allowed honest citizens to legally possess such lethal small arms as well, so that they could use them to protect their lives and property more efficiently against the well armed bandits [PPS 1947: 21/2490, 1941 and 1947]. Public safety vis-à-vis the spread of small arms remained a perennial security issue of Thai society throughout the following decades [NA 1949: (2) SR 0201.18.2/5, News clipping: *Khao Ban Kan Muang*, April 2; NA 1959: M 3.1 K/P7/2502, News clipping: *Siamrath*, November 4].

More interestingly, the wide spread of modern small arms, especially those in the hands of bandits, did not only make the life of property owners and honest citizens worse and more difficult. In many cases, the bandits, with those powerful submachine guns, were far better armed than the police and other local authorities who were chasing after them, as the Interior Minister admitted to the parliament in May 1947 [PPS 1947: 3/2490, 19–20].

During the postwar period, the issue of the proliferation of small arms brought in other serious concerns to the Thai government. After the 1947 Coup in November when the pro Pridi civilian government was toppled by armed forces belonging to the pro Pibul clique, the new government immediately moved to put a tight control over the possession of former Seri Thai arms [PRD 1947: Agenda for ministerial under secretaries conference, 1062–1063; PRD 1947: News release from the Army Supreme Command, 1213].<sup>2)</sup> It was believed by the military Coup makers that a large amount of Seri Thai arms was still at large, hidden away in some secret depots, under the control of former Seri Thai leaders, especially in the Northeast. It was also widely known that all these former Seri Thai leaders, such as Tiang Sirikhan of Sakon Nakhon, were long time close associates of Pridi during and after the war. There was, therefore, a possibility that these former Seri Thai arms may be used against the military backed government by pro Pridi sympathizers in their staging a return to power. Soon, some former more prominent Seri Thai leaders were accused of high treason and charged with upholding their separatist cause. During the following years, arms movements and suspicious activities in the Northeast associated with these pro Pridi former Seri Thai leaders were investigated and reported to the government [NA 1948: SR 0201.32/14, Intelligent report on the activities of the resistance group, from the Commanding General of Army Administrative District III [in the Northeast], Secret, January 15; PRD 1948: Announcement No.5: Situations Along the Borders and in the Northeast, 1510–1512].

Small arms was also an issue of concern for the Thai government in its relations with foreign powers, especially the French whose return to claim their control over French Indochina after the war faced intense, fierce resistance from the Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian nationalist movements. As previously noted, because of its strategic location,

2) The ministerial under secretaries conference was held on the same day of, and only a few hours after, the Coup, on November 9, 1947.

postwar Thailand became a major source of arms supply for these resistance movements in their fighting against the French. Former Seri Thai arms were known to be generously given to these freedom fighters free of charge [Goscha 1999: 188–189]. Thai border areas along the Mekong as well as those facing Cambodia, in most cases with tacitly sympathetic approval of local Thai authorities, became not only the operations bases and hiding places, but were also the staging points for the shipment of arms.<sup>3)</sup> This was not going on without the knowledge of French colonial authorities [MFA 1946: NC 3.11/25, Memo from the under secretary of the Ministry of Interior to the under secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 20]. As early as December 1945, only a few months after the end of WW II, border skirmishes erupted between local Thai authorities and French colonial forces chasing Lao freedom fighters across the border into Thailand. The skirmishes continued well into the following year [NA 1946: (1) M 3.1.2.10/94, Summary of border incidents along Thailand-French Indochina borders]. Diplomatic protests were lodged from both parties, followed by a series of conferences and negotiations [MFA 1946: NC 3:11/18, Memo of conference between Thai and French envoys, April; MFA 1948: NC 3:11/12, Memo: Conference with French Minister, March 16; MFA 1948: NC 3:11/12, Memo: Conference with French Minister, March 30]. Since the pro Pridi civilian government after the war was known to be sympathetic with the anti colonialist cause in neighboring Indochina, on ideological grounds as well as out of their close collaborations during the war years, no truly satisfactory solutions to the deteriorating Franco-Thai relations was achieved in respect of assistance and support, moral or otherwise, that the Thai government rendered to the independence movements in Indochina.

It was only after the 1947 Coup that there was a shift of policy towards those independence movements and the trans border arms shipment. In addition to the move to curb the spread of small arms for both public safety and its own security, the post-1947 government also made every effort to improve the Franco-Thai relations. Attention was given to incidents along the border and negotiation for an agreement on border patrols was proposed [MFA 1948: NC 3:11/12, Memo: Conference with French Minister, March 16; MFA 1948: NC 3:11/12, Memo: Conference with French Minister, March 30]. Assistance and all other favorable treatments including arms shipment formerly extended to all Indochinese nationalist movements were soon terminated [Pimrot 2001: 176–181; Goscha 1999: 323–326]. An appeal for reconsideration from a Thai military advisor to the Lao movement, a former Seri Thai cadre, in 1949 was turned down by Pibul, the Thai Prime Minister [NA 1949: (2) SR 0201.18.2/5, News clipping: *Varasap*, September 11].

However, initial attempt, through local authority, to seal the border in order to stop all trans-border arms shipment to Indochina seemed not much more successful. In June 1950, following the outbreak of the Cold War in Asia, the trans-border arms shipment became yet an even more serious security concern to Thai defense and foreign policy makers. A sub-

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3) For more information on the assistance that the postwar Thai government gave to the Vietnamese nationalist movement in this respect, see Goscha [1999: 195, 210–215]; in the case of the Lao movement, see Pimrot [2002: 143–147].

committee under the National Security Committee was appointed in earnest to oversee the suppression of all contraband arms. The sub-committee was chaired by the Foreign Affairs under secretary. Other members included representatives from the Defense and Interior ministries, the director general of the Police department, and the director general of the Political Affairs department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The military attachés of Great Britain, the US, and France were also invited to the sub-committee meetings. High on its agenda were the monitoring of all contraband arms trade, especially along the borders, and the termination and suppression of all contraband arms traffic [NA 1950: (2) SR 0201.99/37, Appointment of the Sub Committee for the Suppression of Contraband Arms, Urgent-Top Secret, June 17]. Nevertheless, Thailand remained at least during the following years in the early 1950s the major source of arms supply for those underground movements in neighboring states just across the borders, including Burma and the British Malaya, as admitted in a minute of meeting of yet another high level arms traffic control committee in 1953 [NA 1953: (2) SR 0201.99/39, Minute of the meeting of the Committee for the Suppression of Outbound Contraband Arms Traffic, Secret, June 4].

Unlike many other countries in Southeast Asia, in particular British Malaya and the Philippines, Thailand escaped being pulled into prolonged violent battles and widespread intense guerrilla activities. After a few short hours of fighting between local Thai armed forces and home guards on the one hand and on the other the invading Japanese armed forces at various landing sites in the early hours of December 8, 1941, a truce was called. Safe passage for the Japanese army in its advance towards British Malaya and Burma was granted. Soon Thailand became an ally of Japan and declared war against the Allied powers.

Except for the usually expected hardship and shortage of general supplies, the only truly war experience for many Thai was the occasional Allied air bombardments. Even so, the target sites were almost always those strategic places in and around Bangkok and other provincial centers. However, the emergency of wartime was always there; the distinct presence of well armed, battle ready troops, patrols and convoy, not only of those Japanese garrison troops, but also of the Thai armed forces. In the case of the Thai armed forces, it could perhaps be presumed that more conscripts were taken during wartime, and troops formation, arms drills, military tactics instruction and war exercises were conducted more intensely and seriously than those in time of peace. In addition, by 1940s, compulsory education program had more or less been successfully imposed at the primary level on all parts of the country for some years. Now, conscripts in Thai military forces had at least some basic, modern education necessary for the understanding of modern warfare.

For most other Thai, their daily exposure to violence-less war situation may have given them some familiarization with military terminology, weapons and equipment. Automatic pistols, semi automatic rifles, submachine guns, heavy machine guns, anti airplane guns, cannons, grenades, grenade launchers, anti tank launchers, Japanese Zero fighters, Allied B-25 bombers, etc. might have soon entered into their daily conversation with colleagues, neighbors

and friends. So did military formation and tactics, such as ambush, patrol and convoy. To an extent, everyone seemed to become an instant home made expert on weapons, military tactics, war and warfare. In other words, war perpetuates war.

It was however the expanded field activities of the Seri Thai resistance movement during the last year of the war that were responsible for the more or less formal training in military technology and combat tactics of thousands of Thai youths outside military service. From January 1945 on, in preparation for their all out conventional battle as well as guerrilla warfare against the Japanese army, an active recruitment program was executed in full force. Operation bases were established in almost every province throughout the country. Recruits training camps were also set up in some remote locations. Most training camps had either American or British combat and tactical instructors as well as, in some cases, off shore trained Seri Thai members [Haseman 1978: 128; Poonsak 1973: 176]. The training program was usually comprehensive and intensive. For example, at the training camps under the Sakon Nakhon Headquarters in the Northeast, besides formation drills, unarmed self defense and physical exercises, the recruits were given instruction and firing drills of all small and heavy arms, ranging from pistols to rifles, carbines, Sten submachine guns, Bren light machine guns, heavy machine guns, light mortars, and anti tanks bazookas. The use of hand grenades, booby traps, explosives, as well as other sabotage tactics and devices were also part of the field curriculum [Oaun 1976: 71–73; Watthana 1990: 20–21].

The total strength of the entire Seri Thai trained field force is not known. Informed estimates put the total number between 50,000 and 70,000 [Haseman 1978: 126]. Estimated figures of combat trained Seri Thai members for some larger units outside Bangkok are: Uttaradit (North) 5,000; Phetchaburi (Central) 4,300; Mahasarakham (Northeast) 4,000; Sakon Nakhon (Northeast) 3,500; Ubon Ratchathani (Northeast) 3,000; and Chonburi (Central) 2,000 [*ibid.*: 125]. It is to be noted further that most of these Seri Thai recruits were not uneducated, simple peasants or village folks, but were rather fairly well educated. Many were high school graduates and university students. Thousands of them were provincial and village school teachers as well as junior clerks in various government agencies [Oaun 1976: 69–70; Watthana 1990: 19].

Unfortunately, the war ended too soon for the Seri Thai resistance movement and its members to have a chance to prove their audacity and military skills in combat situation. Nevertheless, as Haseman comments in his study of the Thai wartime resistance movement, “If Thailand had gone to war against the Japanese, the country would have possessed a formidable force of military and paramilitary units” [Haseman 1978: 126].

Without even having gone into an all out war, postwar Thailand suddenly found itself flooded over with not only, literally speaking, hundreds of thousands of almost freely circulated modern, lethal small arms, but also thousands of more or less fairly well educated combat trained individuals, the former Seri Thai members.

### The Romance

There is at least one area of postwar Thai society that was noticeably affected by the proliferation of small arms, the spread of military technology, and the consequent surge of crimes. Serious academic research about modern Thai literary development, however, almost always overlooks the existence of one most popular genre that emerged during the postwar years. Even popular writings on the life and works of no longer active novelists and senior literary figures rarely pay any attention to it.<sup>4)</sup> For the postwar period, only those progressive and sophisticated, so called “art for life,” short stories, novels and essays, and their respective authors, seemed to exist, and thus are entitled to a serious study.

There is no doubt that shortage, and hence strict rations, of paper prints supply during the war must have badly affected the Thai literary industry. Very few newspapers, general books, and novels were turned out for the information/imagination of avid readers. The gradual return to normalcy during the postwar years brought along with it the surge in all kinds of literary writings for the general public readership.<sup>5)</sup> Popular fiction received more than a fair share of enthusiastic welcome, especially among the urban readers. Not only had the education reform since the late nineteenth century increased the number of literate public, but social change following the Modernization had also created a new, slowly growing, social group of salaried and self employed people, such as government and private school teachers, government clerks, foreign and local business clerks, small shop and market stall owners, etc. High school and university students may also be included in this new emerging social group. These lower middle class urbanites led a predictably routine life, not always smooth and secure, and, understandably, turned to cheap, affordable, popular entertainment, such as fiction reading, as their pastimes. Fiction consumption either provided them with an escape from all forms of social pressure and from failure in attaining the improbable, ambitious goal in their life, or a fulfillment of their wild imagination, or both.

Thirst for fiction was so obvious after the war that it soon brought about an innovation in the modern Thai literary industry. Daily magazines devoted almost entirely to serialized fictions were published and were very popular among the public. Some authors, writing on a day to day basis, even produced more than one serialized fiction a day. More prominent among these daily magazines were *Ploenjit* and *Piyamit* [Roengchai 1998: 151–153, 160–161]. Those successful serialized fictions were later reissued in book form, often, in multi-volume sets. During the 1950s, some of these fictions were serialized, not in magazines, but rather on their own, in small pocket book size format, published every three, five or seven days and available in most newsstands throughout the country.

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4) There is only one published short academic study of one representative work of this genre known to this author. But this is a study in the field of Thai political culture rather than Thai literary development. See Somkiat [1981: 95–145].

5) For a brief summary of the literary scene during the immediate postwar years, see Phaladisai [1995: 80–83].

Since most of these serialized popular fictions catered for the consumption of none too sophisticated readers, their theme and plot were quite predictable. The most common, standard plot and theme included tragic love story, cross classes love, soapy love story, male adventurous/action story, and the like. However, one particular, newly developed genre stood out during these postwar years. Without a better term, we will call it “crime and violence romance.”

As the term suggests, they were about crime and violence. “Crime” referred to here may be ordinary crime, banditry or organized crime, or all. Death abounded, resulting from murder or violent battle. The heroes were almost always on the other side of the law and their violent actions were legally unauthorized.

During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, many writers made their name, and fortune, from writing this kind of crime and violence romance. The more better known ones are: Sek Dusit, Soh. Navaraj, Phanomthian and, of course, Poh. Intharapalit, its pioneer and the most popular and best known of them all. All are pen names.

As previously noted, and except in the case of Phanomthian who is still active in the literary world, and the late Poh. Intharapalit who, after more than two decades of his death, is still well known as one of the most prolific Thai writers, very little information is available on the life and works, especially the works chronology, of most other writers of this genre. This is particularly true for Sek Dusit and Soh. Navaraj. A recent book on “100 Thai writers” does not have anything on these two prominent authors of crime and violence romance of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>6)</sup>

Born in 1929, Sek Dusit’s first writing in this genre, at his early 20s, was *See King* (Four Kings), followed by *Khrud Dam* (Black Garuda). Both were the adventure stories of a hero named Khom Phayakharaj who, virtually single handedly, violently fought against crime organizations that were threatening the peace loving citizens of Bangkok. The hero fought, mostly unlawfully, to protect the poor and the weak against the villains. *See King* was so successful that his reader fans had to queue up for hours right in front of their neighborhood newsstands to compete for the available copies. But the most popular was *Insee Daeng* (Red Eagle), which first appeared in 1954 when the author was only 25 years old. It was the story of Rome Ritthikrai, the hero, who put on a red mask cut in an eagle profile, hence Red Eagle, when he went out on his self appointed missions to destroy his enemies.<sup>7)</sup> His enemies, or rather the enemies of his country, were crime organizations that somehow were part of the grand networks of international crime organizations, with or without political cause, and the offshore controlled underground communist movement in Thailand. A Cold War flavor was appropriately inserted into the 1950s crime and violence romance!

Soh. Navaraj was one year younger than Sek Dusit. His most successful series of crime

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6) See Prateep [1999]; Another book on Thai writers in the past gives a very vague and sketchy information on them, see Chris [1999: 154–173, 175–191].

7) For basic, general information on Sek Dusit and his works, see Chris [1999: 154–173].



and violence romance was *Yiao Ratree* (Night Hawk), the story of Man Damkoengdej, a rich young man who played classical piano and acted like a crazy man during the day but would be transformed at night into a villain chaser, dressed in black and wearing a black mask cut in a hawk profile. Crime organizations associated with foreign underground communist organization were also major targets of the hero in his crusade against crimes and his country's enemy [Chris 1999: 185–186].

Followed closely in this line of plot and theme were, among others, *Hao Dong* (Wild Cobra) and *Lep Khrud* (Garuda's Nail) by Phanomthian. Written in 1947/1948 while he was just a high school student and published a year or two after his return from education in India in 1955, *Hao Dong* was unique and remarkable in that the main protagonist fighting the villains was a young athletic lady attired in black with a cobra motif on her top piece [Poh. Bunnag 1996: 48; Prateep 1999: 68]. The hero of *Lep Khrud*, first serialized in 1956 and completed in 1957, was Cheep Chuchai, a government secret agent whose primary mission was to destroy yet another crime organization, led by Chang Suliang, a Chinese character, associated with an underground Chinese communist movement. When *Lep Khrud* was first serialized in *Ploenjit* magazine, it was so successful that the magazine sold tens of thousands of copies for each issue. Some reader fans even came to wait at the printing house, just to be the first to get the magazine or not to miss it [Prateep 1999: 67–71; Somchat 1990: 117].

However, it was Poh. Intharapalit's pioneer writings of crime and violence romance that paved the way for the later development of this genre. One of the most prolific and popular writers that the Thai literary world has ever had, he was very successful with generally soapy dramatic fictions during the prewar years. When his *Nakrian Nai Roi*, a soapy drama, was published in 1932 by Ploenjit, about 22,000 copies were sold [Roengchai 1988: 26; Prinya 1998: 14]. His most famous “three buddies” humorous fictions series, a phenomenal success, began its life during the war years and was continued well into the last days of his life in late 1960s [Prinya 1998: 6].

In 1947, he edited the daily *Piyamit* serialized fictions magazine in which almost all of the serialized fictions published were authored by himself [*ibid.*: 15]. One of the first fictions he wrote and published daily in this magazine was *Sua Bai* (“Tiger” Bai<sup>8)</sup>/The Bandit Called Bai), the name of the hero of the story. It ran for several months and after a couple of thousands pages, he ended it. As the open gossip within the fiction printing industry goes, he was both personally and officially “requested” in strong terms by a high ranking Police department chief himself that he terminated the series, since all the heroic actions against the authorities of Sua Bai as a bandit, as well as his many successful escapes from capture, had given a bad image to

8) “*Sua*” or tiger has long been used as an informal/unofficial “honorific” title given to “successful” bandits. Just to prove the popularity and immortality of Sua Bai in Thai society, since the emergence of sexual liberation some two decades ago, the term Sua Bai has been used to refer to those males who have “bi sexual” preference of a certain type. However, as far as this author knows, the fictitious *Sua Bai* half a century or so ago was not a “bi sexual.”



the national Police force [Roengchai 1998: 170–174; Prinya 1998: 78–79]. This was immediately followed by another series, entitled *Sua Dam* (“Tiger” Dam/The Bandit called Dam). It was also very much successful. After its completion, he wrote another series whereby Sua Bai met with Sua Dam, became close friends and joined forces. Other series followed suit. All together, no less than six crime and violence romances, namely *Sua Bai*, *Sua Dam*, *Dao Chon* (Bandit Chief), *Luk Dao Chon* (Son of the Bandit Chief), *Nakak Dam* (Black Mask), and *Yiao Thale* (Sea Hawk), were authored under his name during the late 1940s and early 1950s [Roengchai 1998: 174–180], with estimated total pages (in pocket book format) of no less than 10,000.

*Sua Bai* and *Sua Dam* more or less accurately reflect the turmoil and failure of law and order during the postwar years when Thai society, urban as well as rural, experienced the surge of crimes, widespread corruption, and black market activities. Sua Bai, whose real name in the fiction was Rewat Witchuprapha, a son of a high ranking government officer and incidentally born on the same day as the author himself [*ibid.*: 170], was an engineering graduate from Oxford University. After his return to Thailand he seemed most unhappy with everything going on around him; the corruption of government officials at all levels, the social and economic exploitation inflicted upon the weak and the poor, and the extortion of the “blood sucking,” rich middlemen and moneylenders. At the age of 34 he entered into a marriage with a much younger girl. Soon the marriage failed and one night he found his wife on his own bed in the arms of her lover. He shot them both to death and began his new life as a criminal and a bandit. But he was not a common bandit, rather a “noble bandit,” presumably modeled after the legendary Robin Hood, with high moral conscience. He robbed or attacked only the immoral rich, the corrupt officials, cruel landlords, and the “blood sucking” merchants. He strictly adhered to the typical moral conduct of a “gentleman,” namely fair play, honesty, and on the side of the weak and the poor. He would never harass the fair sex or the weak. He shared his loot with the poor and the under privileged. His fame grew when he successfully evaded the capture of the authorities, using his wit and risky, clever maneuvers. He soon attracted a number of criminals and small time bandits into his fold. His followers grew and he began to organize his band, known as the Black Shirt Bandits for their completely black attires with black cowboy style hat, into, more or less, a “military unit” with command organization. After that the Bandits traveled around the country to fight against all villains, and engaged in “battles” with other less conscientious gangsters or bandits, as well as with the local police and crime suppression force. In its last episode, he fought against the Malayan Chinese guerrilla force in the South during which he presumably died in battle.

Raphin Raveevong was the name of the fictitious Sua Dam. It is to be noted that during the late 1940s and 1950s there was indeed a well known bandit operating to the west of the Central Plain by the same name and it was most likely that the author took the name Sua Dam for his own character. The fictitious Sua Dam also operated in the same area of the real Sua Dam, ie. in Kanchanaburi and Suphanburi as well as in neighboring provinces. To an extent he was a rural copy of Sua Bai as a “noble bandit” in most respects. His band was organized as a “military command” and engaged in “battles” with the authorities and other bandit gangs. In

the end, after long tiring years of fighting and being chased after by the increasingly more efficient police force, Sua Dam gave himself up to the authority at his own will.

The “crime and violence” romance during the postwar years in general and *Sua Bai* and *Sua Dam* in particular were most relevant to the issue of small arms and the spread of military technology in Thai society during the war and postwar years. Both Sua Bai’s Black Shirt Bandits and Sua Dam’s band used as their standard personal arms those powerful, military type, small arms, such as US Army automatic pistols, Stens, carbines, and Thompson submachine guns, hand grenades, and Bren light machine guns, which, as previously noted, were widely available throughout Thailand after the war. Even more interesting were the military command organization, discipline and code of conduct, and tactical maneuvers, that were freely employed by these urban and rural based bandits. Theirs were not simple fights, but rather “military battles.” They set up patrols, inner and outer perimeter guards, and ambushes. They outflanked the enemy’s line, etc. In getting on to the description of their various “battle” scenes, one could not help feeling one was reading a military war story and not a bandit romance.

Although they were only fictions, they however offered evidences to the failure of the state in maintaining law and order, and perhaps as well, to an ongoing structural change in the relationship between the people and the state during the postwar years. Through access to small arms and military technology, groups of individuals could at long last stage most fascinating and formidable challenge to the power of the state, something which had never happened before in modern times.

### Crime and Violence: The Case of Chonburi

Situated along the eastern coast not far to the south of Bangkok and on the old lucrative Siam-Cambodia-Vietnam-Southern China coastal trade route, Chonburi has long been a major settlement in its own right. During the early Bangkok period, its vast virgin forested hinterland served as hiding places for those *phrai* escapees as well as criminals from neighboring coastal towns. Soon later settlements grew out of these remote criminal dens [Sumalee 2000: 19–39]. During the early government centralization and economic expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, crimes seemed to grow out of hand in this coastal region. Bandits, criminals, and hired killers flocked into the areas in hundreds for their share of the growing economy. The area was so infested with bandits and criminals, seriously threatening law and order, that at long last Rama V had to appoint one of his most trusted army commanders and confidants, Phya Surasakmontree, whose past military achievements included the suppressions of the Holy Man’s and the Shan rebellions of 1901–02, the task of suppressing these criminals and bandits and to help restore law and order. A military unit with thousands of battle armed troops under his command moved in, and one of the most fascinating crime suppression campaigns in modern Thai history was launched, with its headquarters at Chonburi itself [*ibid.*: 68–71].

The campaign was more or less successful, but Chonburi, as a thriving coastal trading settlement, has never been without its many criminals, bandits and hired killers. A daily in November 1926 reported a much talked about gun robbery by a group of 11 bandits in a settlement near the provincial administrative town of Chonburi which took some 6,000 baht from a house owner. More than 50 shots were fired during the robbery. In addition, a few months earlier, there was a gun robbery of a Bangkok-Chonburi steamboat by two bandits while the boat was moored at a pier. In its hinterland, the most famous active bandit was Sua Ming who operated out of his base in Phanatnikhom, a growing inland settlement [NA 1926: R7 M 26.2/1, News clipping: *Kroh Lek Raiwan*, November 30].

During WW II, Chonburi, with a major Thai naval base along its coast, was chosen as an operation base and training center of the Seri Thai resistance movement. Some American OSS agents were assigned as advisors and combat and tactical instructors of local recruits which until the very last day of the war amounted to about 2,000 [Haseman 1978: 125]. There is no doubt that enough Allied small arms and ammunition, and more, were shipped into Chonburi to equip these combat trained men. It is to be noted that during the 1950s and well into the 1980s, Chonburi and Phetchaburi, on the western coast not far to the south of Bangkok and also a major Seri Thai operation base with a training camp which trained some 4,300 new recruits, were notoriously known throughout the country as “Gunmen towns.” Most reliable hired gunmen and killers were said to have come from these two provinces.

Postwar Chonburi, however, especially during the 1950s, was quite a unique case. Probably beside only Bangkok, it benefited most from the postwar economic recovery and still later from the national economic development during the 1960s and after. Among all the other major economic activities that went on in full swing were the logging industry and the sugar cane and tapioca plantations. All were taking the advantage of its vast piece of unoccupied virgin forestland a few kilometers inland from the coast. Land became a priced property and cheap labor to till the land and for the logging industry was scarce. In addition, as a sea coastal town, Chonburi was also one of the major centers of all sorts of inbound contraband traffic.<sup>9)</sup>

Thousands of new settlers and fortune seekers from all directions headed toward Chonburi during the 1950s, and Chonburi yet again became more or less a lawless province. Gunmen, hired killers and local mafia bosses emerged in increasing number. Crimes spread and gangsters abounded. Peasants were beaten and their lands taken. Most notorious of crimes, however, was the “*khai narok*” (Lit. hell camps) where laborers, in particular those from the postwar economically stricken Northeast, were violently forced to work in the field in daytime and locked up at night under armed guards. Those who dared to escape from the plantations received death sentences [NA 1959: M 3.1 Ph/P7/2502, News clipping: *Sarn Seri*, July 28]. Murder over land contests and battles between mafia gangsters, using almost always modern, military type, small arms, leading to more killings, were not unusual. Literally

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9) For a general description of postwar Chonburi in this respect, see Sumalee [2000: 109–114].

speaking, almost never a day passing that was without a violent criminal case.

The 1950s big business and the availability of powerful arms obviously affected the power structure of crime. During the prewar years, most criminals and bandits either worked on their own, as “lone bandits,” or as a band under the leadership of one of their own peers. They may have had a connection in high places, local or otherwise, and as protégés, remained out of trouble with the authority. In the postwar Chonburi crime and violence, most bandits and criminals were soon forced to come under, more like an employee, the organization of one of the local mafia bosses. Some became in their own right mafia bosses with their own crime organizations [Sumalee 2000: 131–132]. Connection for protection was also established with powerful politicians and bureaucrats in Bangkok by many crime organizations; General Phao Siyanon, the Police director general and most powerful strongman of Thai politics during the 1950s, for instance [*ibid.*: 132]. This last probably explains why the Chonburi crime and violence during the 1950s was given little attention by the authorities and allowed to drag on for some years.

Among Sarit’s top agenda after the 1958 Coup, beside the national security threat from domestic and international communist movements, were the suppression of bandits, gangsters, bad characters and the restoration of law and order. The deterioration of law and order in Chonburi province must have been very serious and have gone too far in Sarit’s eyes. Not quite a year after the 1958 Coup, in July 1959, the government moved in. A special task force command was set up to be in charge of the suppression of crimes in Chonburi. It was a military operation under the command of no one else but Sarit, the 1958 Coup leader, the Prime Minister and the Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces, himself [*ibid.*: 144].

Army, marine and police forces as well as a few airborne infantry units took part in this military like expedition against crime. Military and police check points and road blocks were installed on all major roads. An inland area of 2,500 square kilometers extending into neighboring provinces, the heartland of all violence and gangster battles where most of the plantations and saw mills and private arsenals of local mafia bosses were situated, were sealed off, followed by coordinated surprise attacks by the armed forces [*ibid.*: 145]. Hundreds of criminals, gunmen, and mafia bosses were arrested and huge piles of arms and ammunition were captured. The crime cleansing campaign ran for weeks [NA 1959: M 3.1 Ph/P7/2502, News clipping: *Sarn Seri*, July 24; NA 1959: M 3.1 Ph/P7/2502, News clipping: *Sarn Seri*, July 28; NA 1959: M 3.1 Ph/P7/2502, News clipping: *Phim Thai*, August 26].

This late 1950s military operation for the suppression of crimes was a repeat of the similar operation conducted in the very same area half a century or so ago. The use of military forces revealed just the scale of the disruption of law and order that the proliferation of small arms during the postwar years inflicted upon a section of Thai society.

Yet the crime suppression campaign in Chonburi in the late 1950s was far from an absolute success. Law and order were only temporarily restored. The plantation based economy in and around Chonburi not only continued to grow but by the mid 1960s this area also experienced a

dramatic increase of investment in the service sector and the growth of the tourism industry, thanks to Thailand's involvement in the Vietnam War and its economic development strategy. Soon a new crop of local mafia bosses emerged and crime and violence returned in full force.

### Conclusion

The surge of crime and violence in postwar Thai society as discussed above was well reflected in, and corroborated by, the new Thai literary genre of "crime and violence romance," emerging almost immediately after the war. The theme and popularity of this unique genre attest to the breakdown of the state monopoly of modern military technology and the consequent breakdown of law and order in urban and rural Thai society. In other words, with regard to these breakdowns of the state monopoly of military technology and of law and order in general, both the reality and the imagination were one and the same.

To an extent, both the fictitious postwar crime and violence as portrayed in crime and violence romance and the actual postwar crime and violence in Thai society as in the case of Chonburi were obviously consequent upon the proliferation of small arms and the "democratization" of military technology during WW II and after. Yet, there were at least three sharp differences between the "reality" and the "imagination." Of course, both the real crimes and the imagined ones had in common the possession of small arms, the Seri Thai Allied arms. However, while the fictitious bandits, particularly in the cases of Sua Bai and Sua Dam, were organized and functioned as a military unit, and fought their battles using military tactics, the 1950s organized crimes in Chonburi were not. While the crimes the Chonburi mafia bosses committed obviously trespassed upon the law, seriously posing a challenge to the power of the state,<sup>10</sup> unlike the fictitious bandits, they scarcely engaged in direct confrontation, not to say "battle," with the state. Still further, while those fictitious military like bandits were handled largely by local police and the Police Department crime suppression force, the 1950s organized crimes were, however, suppressed by a military task force.

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10) Following the 1958 suppression, some of the Chonburi mafia bosses were charged by the authority as rebels, see NA [1959: M 3.1 Ph/P7/2502, News clipping: *Phim Thai*, August 10].

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